

## *On Poetry: a Rhapsody*

All human race would fain be wits,  
And millions miss, for one that hits.  
Young's universal passion, pride,  
Was never known to spread so wide.  
Say Britain, could you ever boast,  
Three poets in an age at most?  
Our chilling climate hardly bears  
A sprig of bays in fifty years:  
While every fool his claim alleges,  
10 As if it grew in common hedges.  
What reason can there be assigned  
For this perverseness in the mind?  
Brutes find out where their talents lie:  
A bear will not attempt to fly:  
A foundered horse will oft debate,  
Before he tries a five-barred gate:  
A dog by instinct turns aside,  
Who sees the ditch too deep and wide.  
But man we find the only creature,  
20 Who, led by folly, combats nature;  
Who, when she loudly cries, 'Forbear',  
With obstinacy fixes there;  
And, where his genius least inclines,  
Absurdly bends his whole designs.

Not empire to the rising sun,  
By valour, conduct, fortune won;  
Nor highest wisdom in debates  
For framing laws to govern states;  
Nor skill in sciences profound,  
30 So large to grasp the circle round;

Such heavenly influence require,  
As how to strike the muses' lyre.

Not beggar's brat, on bulk begot;  
Not bastard of a pedlar Scot;  
Not boy brought up to cleaning shoes,  
The spawn of Bridewell, or the stews;  
Not infants dropped, the spurious pledges  
Of gypsies littering under hedges,  
Are so disqualified by fate  
40 To rise in church, or law, or state,  
As he, whom Phoebus in his ire  
Hath *blasted* with poetic fire.

What hope of custom in the fair,  
While not a soul demands your ware?  
Where you have nothing to produce  
For private life, or public use?  
Court, city, country want you not;  
You cannot bribe, betray, or plot.  
For poets, law makes no provision:  
50 The wealthy have you in derision.  
Of state affairs you cannot smatter,  
Are awkward when you try to flatter.  
Your portion, taking Britain round,  
Was just one annual hundred pound.  
Now not so much as in remainder  
Since Cibber brought in an attainder;  
For ever fixed by right divine,  
(A monarch's right) on Grub Street line.

Poor starveling bard, how small thy gains!  
60 How unproportioned to thy pains!  
And here a simile comes pat in:  
Though chickens take a month to fatten,  
The guests in less than half an hour  
Will more than half a score devour.  
So, after toiling twenty days,  
To earn a stock of pence and praise,  
Thy labours, grown the critic's prey,  
Are swallowed o'er a dish of tea;

Gone, to be never heard of more,  
 70 Gone, where the chickens went before.

How shall a new attempter learn  
*Of different spirits to discern,*  
 And how distinguish, which is which,  
 The poet's vein, or scribbling itch?  
 Then hear an old experienced sinner  
 Instructing thus a young beginner.

Consult yourself, and if you find  
 A powerful impulse urge your mind,  
 Impartial judge within your breast  
 80 What subject you can manage best;  
 Whether your genius most inclines  
 To satire, praise, or humorous lines;  
 To elegies in mournful tone,  
 Or prologue 'sent from hand unknown.'  
 Then rising with Aurora's light,  
 The muse invoked, sit down to write;  
 Blot out, correct, insert, refine,  
 Enlarge, diminish, interline.  
 Be mindful, when invention fails,  
 90 To scratch your head, and bite your nails.

Your poem finished; next your care  
 Is needful, to transcribe it fair.  
 In modern wit all printed trash, is  
 Set off with numerous breaks – and dashes –  
 To statesmen would you give a wipe,  
 You print it in *italic type*.  
 When letters are in vulgar shapes,  
 'Tis ten to one the wit escapes;  
 But when in CAPITALS expressed,  
 100 The dullest reader smokes a jest.  
 Or else perhaps he may invent  
 A better than the poet meant,  
 As learned commentators view  
 In Homer more than Homer knew.

Your poem in its modish dress,  
 Correctly fitted for the press,  
 Convey by penny post to Lintot,



But let no friend alive look into't.  
 If Lintot thinks 'twill quit the cost,  
 110 You need not fear your labour lost:  
 And, how agreeably surprised  
 Are you to see it advertised!  
 The hawker shows you one in print,  
 As fresh as farthings from the mint:  
 The product of your toil and sweating;  
 A bastard of your own begetting.

Be sure at Will's the following day,  
 Lie snug, to hear what critics say.  
 And if you find the general vogue  
 120 Pronounces you a stupid rogue;  
 Damns all your thoughts as low and little,  
 Sit still, and swallow down your spittle.  
 Be silent as a politician,  
 For, talking may beget suspicion:  
 Or praise the judgement of the town,  
 And help yourself to run it down.  
 Give up a fond paternal pride,  
 Nor argue on the weaker side;  
 For, poems read without a name  
 130 We justly praise, or justly blame:  
 And critics have no partial views,  
 Except they know whom they abuse.  
 And since you ne'er provoked their spite,  
 Depend upon't their judgement's right:  
 But if you blab, you are undone;  
 Consider what a risk you run.  
 You lose your credit all at once;  
 The town will mark you for a dunce:  
 The vilest doggerel Grub Street sends,  
 140 Will pass for yours with foes and friends.  
 And you must bear the whole disgrace,  
 Till some fresh blockhead takes your place.

Your secret kept, your poem sunk,  
 And sent in quires to line a trunk;  
 If still you be disposed to rhyme,  
 Go try your hand a second time.  
 Again you fail, yet safe's the word,

- Take courage and attempt a third.  
 But first with care employ your thoughts,  
 150 Where critics marked your former faults.  
 The trivial turns, the borrowed wit,  
 The similes that nothing fit;  
 The cant which every fool repeats,  
 Town-jests, and coffee-house conceits;  
 Descriptions tedious, flat and dry,  
 And introduced the Lord knows why;  
 Or where you find your fury set  
 Against the harmless alphabet;  
 On A's and B's your malice vent,  
 160 While readers wonder whom you meant.  
 A public, or a private robber;  
 A statesman, or a South Sea jobber.  
 A prelate who no God believes;  
 A parliament, or den of thieves.  
 A house of peers, or gaming crew,  
 A griping monarch, or a Jew.  
 A pickpurse, at the bar, or bench;  
 A duchess, or a suburb wench.  
 Or oft when epithets you link,  
 170 In gaping lines to fill a chink;  
 Like stepping stones to save a stride,  
 In streets where kennels are too wide:  
 Or like a heel-piece to support  
 A cripple with one foot too short:  
 Or like a bridge that joins a marish  
 To moorlands of a different parish.  
 So have I seen ill-coupled hounds,  
 Drag different ways in miry grounds.  
 So geographers in Afric maps  
 180 With savage pictures fill their gaps;  
 And o'er unhabitable downs  
 Place elephants for want of towns.

But though you miss your third essay,  
 You need not throw your pen away.  
 Lay now aside all thoughts of fame,  
 To spring more profitable game.  
 From party merit seek support;

The vilest verse thrives best at court.  
 And may you ever have the luck  
 190 To rhyme almost as well as Duck;  
 And, though you never learned to scan verse,  
 Come out with some lampoon on D'Anvers.  
 A pamphlet in Sir Bob's defence  
 Will never fail to bring in pence;  
 Nor be concerned about the sale,  
 He pays his workmen on the nail.

Display the blessings of the nation,  
 And praise the whole administration,  
 Extol the bench of bishops round,  
 200 Who at them rail bid God confound:  
 To bishop-haters answer thus  
 (The only logic used by us),  
 What though they don't believe in Christ,  
 Deny them Protestants – thou liest.

A prince the moment he is crowned,  
 Inherits every virtue round,  
 As emblems of the sovereign power,  
 Like *other* baubles of the Tower.  
 Is generous, valiant, just and wise,  
 210 And so continues till he dies.  
 His humble senate this professes,  
 In all their speeches, votes, addresses.  
 But once you fix him in a tomb,  
 His virtues fade, his vices bloom;  
 And each perfection wrong imputed  
 Is fully at his death confuted.  
 His panegyrics then are ceased,  
 He's grown a tyrant, dunce and beast.  
 The loads of poems in his praise,  
 220 Ascending make one funeral blaze.  
 As soon as you can hear his knell,  
 This god on earth turns devil in hell.  
 And lo, his ministers of state,  
 Transformed to imps, his levees wait:  
 Where, in the scenes of endless woe,  
 They ply their former arts below:



And as they sail in Charon's boat,  
 Contrive to bribe the judge's vote.  
 To Cerberus they give a sop,  
 230 His triple-barking mouth to stop:  
 Or in the ivory gate of dreams,  
 Project Excise and South Sea schemes:  
 Or hire their party pamphleteers,  
 To set Elysium by the ears.

Then poet, if you mean to thrive,  
 Employ your muse on kings alive;  
 With prudence gathering up a cluster  
 Of all the virtues you can muster:  
 Which formed into a garland sweet,  
 240 Lay humbly at your monarch's feet;  
 Who, as the odours reach his throne,  
 Will smile, and think 'em all his own:  
 For law and gospel both determine  
 All virtues lodge in royal ermine.  
 (I mean the oracles of both  
 Who shall depose it upon oath.)  
 Your garland in the following reign,  
 Change but the names, will do again.

But if you think this trade too base,  
 250 (Which seldom is the dunce's case)  
 Put on the critic's brow, and sit  
 At Will's, the puny judge of wit.  
 A nod, a shrug, a scornful smile,  
 With caution used, may serve awhile.  
 Proceed no further in your part,  
 Before you learn the terms of art:  
 (For you can never be too far gone,  
 In all our modern critics' jargon.)  
 Then talk with more authentic face,  
 260 Of 'unities, in time and place.'  
 Get scraps of Horace from your friends,  
 And have them at your fingers' ends.  
 Learn Aristotle's rules by rote,  
 And at all hazards boldly quote:  
 Judicious Rymer oft review:  
 Wise Dennis, and profound Bossu.

Read all the prefaces of Dryden,  
 For these our critics much confide in,  
 (Though merely writ at first for filling  
 270 To raise the volume's price, a shilling.)

A forward critic often dupes us  
 With sham quotations *Peri Hupsous*:  
 And if we have not read Longinus,  
 Will magisterially outshine us.  
 Then, lest with Greek he overrun ye,  
 Procure the book for love or money,  
 Translated from Boileau's translation,  
 And quote quotation on quotation.

At Will's you hear a poem read,  
 280 Where Battus from the table head,  
 Reclining on his elbow-chair,  
 Gives judgement with decisive air.  
 To him the tribe of circling wits,  
 As to an oracle submits.  
 He gives directions to the town,  
 To cry it up, or run it down.  
 (Like courtiers, when they send a note,  
 Instructing members how to vote.)  
 He sets a stamp of bad and good,  
 290 Though not a word be understood.  
 Your lesson learnt, you'll be secure  
 To get the name of connoisseur.  
 And when your merits once are known,  
 Procure disciples of your own.

For poets (you can never want 'em,  
 Spread through Augusta Trinobantum)  
 Computing by their pecks of coals,  
 Amount to just nine thousand souls.  
 These o'er their proper districts govern,  
 300 Of wit and humour, judges sovereign.  
 In every street a city bard  
 Rules, like an alderman his ward.  
 His indisputed rights extend  
 Through all the lane, from end to end.  
 The neighbours round admire his shrewdness,



For songs of loyalty and lewdness.  
 Outdone by none in rhyming well,  
 Although he never learnt to spell.

Two bordering wits contend for glory;  
 310 And one is Whig, and one is Tory.  
 And this, for epics claims the bays,  
 And that, for elegiac lays.  
 Some famed for numbers soft and smooth,  
 By lovers spoke in Punch's booth.  
 And some as justly fame extols  
 For lofty lines in Smithfield drolls.  
 Bavius in Wapping gains renown,  
 And Maevius reigns o'er Kentish Town:  
 Tigellius placed in Phoebus' car,  
 320 From Ludgate shines to Temple Bar.  
 Harmonious Cibber entertains  
 The court with annual birthday strains;  
 Whence Gay was banished in disgrace,  
 Where Pope will never show his face;  
 Where Young must torture his invention,  
 To flatter knaves, or lose his pension.

But these are not a thousandth part  
 Of jobbers in the poet's art,  
 Attending each his proper station,  
 330 And all in due subordination;  
 Through every alley to be found,  
 In garrets high, or underground:  
 And when they join their pericranies,  
 Out skips a book of miscellanies.

Hobbes clearly proves that every creature  
 Lives in a state of war by nature.  
 The greater for the smaller watch,  
 But meddle seldom with their match.  
 A whale of moderate size will draw  
 340 A shoal of herrings down his maw.  
 A fox with geese his belly crams;  
 A wolf destroys a thousand lambs.  
 But search among the rhyming race,  
 The *brave* are worried by the *base*.  
 If, on Parnassus' top you sit,

You rarely bite, are always bit:  
 Each poet of inferior size  
 On you shall rail and criticize;  
 And strive to tear you limb from limb,  
 350 While others do as much for him.  
 The vermin only tease and pinch  
 Their foes superior by an inch.  
 So, naturalists observe, a flea  
 Hath smaller fleas that on him prey,  
 And these have smaller yet to bite 'em,  
 And so proceed *ad infinitum*:  
 Thus every poet in his kind,  
 Is bit by him that comes behind;  
 Who, though too little to be seen,  
 360 Can tease, and gall, and give the spleen;  
 Call dunces, fools, and sons of whores,  
 Lay Grub Street at each other's doors:  
 Extol the Greek and Roman masters,  
 And curse our modern poetasters.  
 Complain, as many an ancient bard did,  
 How genius is no more rewarded;  
 How wrong a taste prevails among us;  
 How much our ancestors outsung us;  
 Can personate an awkward scorn  
 370 For those who are not poets born:  
 And all their brother dunces lash,  
 Who crowd the press with hourly trash.

O, Grub Street! how I do bemoan thee,  
 Whose graceless children scorn to own thee!  
 This filial piety forgot,  
 Deny their country like a Scot:  
 Though by their idiom and grimace  
 They soon betray their native place:  
 Yet *thou* hast greater cause to be  
 380 Ashamed of them, than they of thee.  
 Degenerate from their ancient brood,  
 Since first the court allowed them food.

Remains a difficulty still,  
 To purchase fame by writing ill:  
 From Flecknoe down to Howard's time,  
 How few have reached the low sublime!

For when our high-born Howard died,  
 Blackmore alone his place supplied:  
 And lest a chasm should intervene,  
 390 When death had finished Blackmore's reign,  
 The leaden crown devolved to thee,  
 Great poet of the *Hollow Tree*.  
 But, oh, how unsecure thy throne!  
 Ten thousand bards thy rights disown:  
 They plot to turn in factious zeal,  
 Duncenia to a common-weal;  
 And with rebellious arms pretend  
 And equal privilege to *descend*.

In bulk there are not more degrees,  
 400 From elephants to mites in cheese,  
 Than what a curious eye may trace  
 In creatures of the rhyming race.  
 From bad to worse, and worse they fall,  
 But, who can reach to worst of all?  
 For, though in nature depth and height  
 Are equally held infinite,  
 In poetry the height we know;  
 'Tis only infinite below.  
 For instance: when you rashly think,  
 410 No rhymer can like Welsted sink:  
 His merits balanced you shall find,  
 The laureate leaves him far behind.  
 Concanen, more aspiring bard,  
 Climbs downwards, deeper by a yard:  
 Smart Jemmy Moor with vigour drops,  
 The rest pursue as thick as hops:  
 With heads to points the gulf they enter,  
 Linked perpendicular to the centre:  
 And as their heels elated rise,  
 420 Their heads attempt the nether skies.

O, what indignity and shame  
 To prostitute the muse's name,  
 By flattering kings whom heaven designed  
 The plagues and scourges of mankind.  
 Bred up in ignorance and sloth,  
 And every vice that nurses both.



Perhaps you say Augustus shines  
 Immortal made in Virgil's lines,  
 And Horace brought the tuneful choir  
 430 To sing his virtues on the lyre,  
 Without reproach of flattery; true,  
 Because their praises were his due.  
 For in those ages kings we find,  
 Were animals of humankind,  
 But now go search all Europe round,  
 Among the savage monsters crowned,  
 With vice polluting every throne  
 (I mean all kings except our own)  
 In vain you make the strictest view  
 440 To find a king in all the crew  
 With whom a footman out of place  
 Would not conceive a high disgrace,  
 A burning shame, a crying sin,  
 To take his morning's cup of gin.  
 Thus all are destined to obey  
 Some beast of burden or of prey.  
 'Tis sung Prometheus forming man  
 Through all the brutal species ran,  
 Each proper quality to find  
 450 Adapted to a human mind;  
 A mingled mass of good and bad,  
 The worst and best that could be had;  
 Then from a clay of mixture base,  
 He shaped a king to rule the race,  
 Endowed with gifts from every brute,  
 Which best the regal nature suit.  
 Thus think on kings, the name denotes  
 Hogs, asses, wolves, baboons and goats,  
 To represent in figure just  
 460 Sloth, folly, rapine, mischief, lust.  
 O! were they all but Nebuchadnezzars,  
 What herds of kings would turn to grazers.

Fair Britain, in thy monarch blessed,  
 Whose virtues bear the strictest test;  
 Whom never faction can bespatter,  
 Nor minister nor poet flatter.

- What justice in rewarding merit!  
 What magnanimity of spirit!  
 How well his public thrift is shown!  
 470 All coffers full except his own.  
 What lineaments divine we trace  
 Through all his figure, mien, and face;  
 Though peace with olive bind his hands,  
 Confessed the conquering hero stands.  
 Hydaspes, Indus, and the Ganges,  
 Dread from his hand impending changes.  
 From him the Tartar, and Chinese,  
*Short by the knees* intreat for peace.  
 The consort of his throne and bed,  
 480 A perfect goddess born and bred.  
 Appointed sovereign judge to sit  
 On learning, eloquence and wit.  
 Our eldest hope, divine Iulus,  
 (Late, very late, O, may he rule us.)  
 What early manhood has he shown,  
 Before his downy beard was grown!  
 Then think, what wonders will be done  
 By going on as he begun;  
 An heir for Britain to secure  
 490 As long as sun and moon endure.

The remnant of the royal blood,  
 Comes pouring on me like a flood.  
 Bright goddesses, in number five;  
 Duke William, sweetest prince alive.

- Now sing the minister of state,  
 Who shines alone, without a mate.  
 Observe with what majestic port  
 This Atlas stands to prop the court:  
 Intent the public debts to pay,  
 500 Like prudent Fabius by delay.  
 Thou great vicegerent of the King,  
 Thy praises every muse shall sing:  
 In all affairs thou sole director,  
 Of wit and learning chief protector;  
 Though small the time thou hast to spare,

The church is thy peculiar care.  
 Of pious prelates what a stock  
 You choose to rule the sable flock.  
 You raise the honour of the peerage,  
 510 Proud to attend you at the steerage.  
 You dignify the noble race,  
 Content yourself with humbler place,  
 Now learning, valour, virtue, sense,  
 To titles give the sole pretence.  
 St George beheld thee with delight,  
 Vouchsafe to be an azure knight,  
 When on thy breast and sides Herculean,  
 He fixed the star and string cerulean.

Say, poet, in what other nation,  
 520 Shone ever such a constellation.  
 Attend ye Popes, and Youngs, and Gays,  
 And tune your harps, and strow your bays.  
 Your panegyrics here provide,  
 You cannot err on flattery's side.  
 Above the stars exalt your style,  
 You still are low ten thousand mile.  
 On Lewis all his bards bestowed,  
 Of incense many a thousand load;  
 But Europe mortified his pride,  
 530 And swore the fawning rascals lied:  
 Yet what the world refused to Lewis,  
 Applied to George exactly true is:  
 Exactly true! Invidious poet!  
 'Tis fifty thousand times below it.

Translate me now some lines, if you can,  
 From Virgil, Martial, Ovid, Lucan;  
 They could all power in heaven divide,  
 And do no wrong to either side:  
 They teach you how to split a hair,  
 540 Give George and Jove an equal share.  
 Yet, why should we be laced so straight;  
 I'll give my monarch butter-weight.  
 And reason good; for many a year  
 Jove never intermeddled here:



536 THE HARDSHIP PUT UPON LADIES

Nor, though his priests be duly paid,  
Did ever we desire his aid:  
We now can better do without him,  
Since Woolston gave us arms to rout him.

\* \* \* \* \* *Caetera desiderantur* \* \* \* \* \*

## ON POETRY: A RHAPSODY

First published by J. Huggonson in London; dated 1733 and apparently published on the very last day of that year (*T* 741; *Foxon* S888). The title-page refers to a non-existent earlier Dublin printing, the familiar copyright device. Re-

printed [Edinburgh, 1734]: this is *T* 742, *Foxon* S889. The real Dublin edition, by S. Hyde (*T* 743, *Foxon* S890), must have been published by 28 January 1734, when 'several printers and publishers, at Dublin, were taken into custody, for printing and publishing a poem, called *The Rhapsody on Poetry*' (news item in *Political State*, March 1734, quoted by *P* II, 640). The work went into a London collection during that year and then into *WF* and *Misc* (1735). The text here is based on *WF*, with blanks supplied from earlier printings and with additions listed below.

Six supplementary passages, ranging in length from two lines to thirty-six, have subsequently come to light. Four were printed by Scott as an addendum in 1824; two of these, plus a different pair of supplementary lines, are found in a transcript among the Orrery papers at Harvard. All six passages (with one couplet supplied by Scott missing) are in *HEH* 81494, in the volume which contains a transcript of *To a Lady*. See *Mayhew*, pp. 97–100, for a full description of the *HEH* material. Previous editors have reproduced these passages as 'rejected' lines, in a separate group. Williams argues (*P* II, 639) that 'if these passages were omitted primarily on political grounds, we cannot be sure how far the omissions represent Swift's intention. It would be inadvisable to incorporate them violently in the text of one of his most finished poems, and they are here, therefore, relegated to an appendix.' *PHD* follows the same practice, whilst *PJH* omits the additional lines.

The Penguin text incorporates all six passages, a new departure. (They form ll. 165–6, 189–92, 197–204, 217–18, 427–62, and 469–70). Orrery's transcript describes them as 'Verses by Dean Swift which ought to have been inserted in the *Rhapsody*, if it had been safe to print them'. The auxiliary verb is worth noting. In my view, it is significant that the *Rhapsody* went into *WF* intact, with the exception of a few blank words here and there. Even when the volume was reconstructed and *To a Lady* deleted altogether, nothing was done to the text of *On Poetry: a Rhapsody*. The reason, in my judgement, is simple: the censoring had already been performed before the first printing, as had not been the case with *To a Lady*. The *Rhapsody* is the more outspoken of the two, in its full version; and it was generally thought that the action taken against *To a Lady* arose largely from the ministry's displeasure concerning its opposite number (nothing was done until the *Rhapsody* appeared and caused a stir at the beginning of 1734). I conclude that the six passages were omitted simply and solely because of their inflammatory content. No 'violence' is done in restoring them to the text; they are stylistically in key, thematically relevant, and poetically enriching.

The exact date of composition is not known. *Mayhew*, p. 112, suggests that the poem 'was probably composed at about the same time as the latter half of [*To a Lady*]', which he would set at 1732 or the first half of 1733. A letter from Mrs Pendarves, tentatively allotted to the spring of 1733, mentions the work in progress (see *PJH* II, 800). In my opinion, the references to Gay (ll. 323, 521) are more likely to have been written during his lifetime than after it, i.e. before 4 December 1732; Swift was concerned about treatment of Gay by the court at this juncture, just before he received news of Gay's death (*Corr* IV, 97–100). There is no mention of the poem in Swift's surviving correspondence, apart from a glancing allusion by Pope when the *Rhapsody* was first published (*Corr* IV, 217–18).

The Oxford Jacobite William King reports in his memoirs that Queen Caroline was at first deceived by the ironies of the poem, until she was enlightened by



Lord Hervey. *Mayhew*, p. 113, reprints an Anglo-Latin fragment from *FV* which serves to confirm this story. The plain-spoken verses omitted (ll. 427–62) would not have aided the deception; and so their exclusion may have been part of the obfuscating tactics, rather than a basic poetic strategy.

It does not seem to have been observed that a famous section of the poem (ll. 353 ff.), in which Grub Street hacks are compared to lice and vermin, has a direct source in an essay by Addison. A controlling idea of Swift's work is actually borrowed from *Tatler*, no. 229 (26 September 1710), which opens as follows:

The whole creation preys upon itself: every living creature is inhabited. A flea has a thousand invisible insects that tease him as he jumps from place to place, and revenge our quarrels upon him. A very ordinary microscope shows us, that a louse is itself a very lousy creature. A whale, besides those seas and oceans in the several vessels of his body, which are filled with innumerable shoals of little animals, carries about it a whole world of inhabitants; insomuch that, if we believe the calculations some have made, there are more living creatures which are too small for the naked eye to behold about the Leviathan, than there are of visible creatures upon the face of the whole earth. Thus every nobler creature is as it were the basis and support of multitudes that are his inferiors.

This consideration very much comforts me, when I think of those numberless vermin that feed upon this paper, and find their substance out of it; I mean, the small wits and scribblers that every day turn a penny by nibbling at my lucubrations. This has been so advantageous to this little species of writers, that, if they do me justice, I may expect to have my statue erected in Grub Street, as being a common benefactor to that quarter.

The paper continues in the same vein, using images such as 'fleas' and a 'fry of little authors'. Swift was in London when this *Tatler* appeared: he had dined with Addison several times that month, most recently on 18 September (*JTS* I, 12, 14, 19, 22).

There were contemporary replies (*T* 1311, 1316, 1319) but no concerted howl of protest from an affronted Grub Street. Since then the poem has been the subject of extensive commentary, particularly in the last twenty-five years. *Ball*, p. 284, cites Goldsmith's view that it is one of the 'best versified' poems in the language (see Goldsmith, *Works*, ed. A. Friedman (1966), V, 323). More recent discussions include Herbert Davis, *Jonathan Swift: Essays on His Satire* (1964), pp. 169–71; David Ward, *Jonathan Swift: A Critical Introduction* (1973), pp. 197–200; *Johnson*, pp. 15–20, exploring a tripartite structure in the poem; *Jaffe*, pp. 44–51; *Fischer*, pp. 177–97; and (exploring the 'configurations of limitlessness' in this and other works by Swift) C.J. Rawson, *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader* (1973), pp. 60–83. One pervasive strain in the poem's imaginative operations is described in *Grub Street*, pp. 243–7.

**Title** the spelling is 'Rapsody' in early editions; *Mayhew*, p. 112, connects this with a 'slangy double-pun upon "a rapp" or counterfeit coin and a "rap" or knock on the head'. It should, however, be stressed that the spelling was not uncommon, though becoming old-fashioned. For the implications of the word in an Augustan context, see P. Rogers, 'Shaftesbury and the Aesthetics of Rhapsody', *British Journal of Aesthetics* XII (1972), 244–57.

*WF* adds a headnote: 'The following poem was published in London and

Dublin, and having been much admired, we thought proper to include it in this collection: and although the author be not known, yet we hope it will be acceptable to our readers.' Note the surviving degree of caution.

3 *Young's universal passion* the series of satires, *The Universal Passion: The Love of Fame* (1725-8), by Edward Young.

11-24 compare *The Beast's Confession*, esp. ll. 203-20.

15 *founded* suffering from an inflamed foot and so lame.

19-20 for the rhyme, compare ll. 335-6, as well as *A Fable of the Widow and Her Cat* 2-5; *Strephon and Chloe* 19-20.

33 *beggar's brat* a boy used to inspire compassion by a beggar: compare Gay, *Trivia* II, 142 (Gay, I, 147). See C. Probyn, *Notes & Queries*, XVI (1969) 184. This verse-paragraph owes an obvious debt to *Trivia* II, 135-65, describing Cloacinna's upbringing of her foundling son ('bulk', 'beggar's brat', 'dropped', shoe-cleaning, etc.)

*bulk* 'stall in front of a shop, on or under which indigents often slept' (note in Gay, II, 558, to *Trivia* II, 140).

36 *Bridewell* see *A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed* 41.

*stews* the quarter where brothels abounded.

37 *dropped* compare the famous reference in *A Modest Proposal* to 'a child just dropped from its dam' (PW XII, 11).

42 *blasted* the central meaning is 'blighted, cursed', but the italics warn the reader of punning overtones ('puffed up', etc.).

51 *smatter* see *The Dean's Reasons for Not Building at Drapier's Hill* 60. The author of *A Tale of a Tub* planned a 'new help of smatterers' (*Tale*, p. 130).

54 *hundred pound* 'paid to the poet laureate, which place was given to one Cibber' (note in WF). The annual stipend was fixed at £100 by Charles I in 1630.

56 *brought in an attainder* the idea seems to be that Cibber (through his unworthiness) had corrupted and dishonoured the office, so that only the least admirable could inherit the post thereafter. An attainder was a process of degrading a criminal so that his heirs could not have titles or property transmitted to them.

72 the italics probably indicate an allusion, possibly to 1 Corinthians xii, 10.

77ff. the remainder of the poem is in the tradition of 'instructions' (here to a poet), the common seventeenth-century way of organizing a satire.

84 '*sent from hand unknown*' a regular formula used in connection with dramatic prologues and epilogues.

85 *Aurora* goddess of the dawn.

90 the traditional pose of the hack writer, as in Hogarth's *Distressed Poet* (1735).

91-104 Swift's satire on these features (prominent in the broadside editions of his own poems) may justify some editorial licence in the treatment of accidentals. There is no evidence that Swift sought to have his texts garnished in this fashion.

95 *wipe* see *My Lady's Lamentation* 7.

100 *smokes* recognizes, gets the point of.

103 *learnéd commentators* notably the author of *A Tale of a Tub*, who discourses on Homer's limitations and discovers strange matter in the poetry (*Tale*, pp. 127-8).

107 *Lintot* 'a bookseller in London' (note in WF). See Biog. Dict. and *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* 253.

109 *quit* requite, repay.



- 113 *hawker* see *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* 279.
- 117 *Will's* 'the poet's coffee-house' (note in *WF*). See *To Mr Congreve* 146.
- 118 *snug* in hiding.
- 122 *swallow down your spittle* restrain your anger: compare *Job* vii, 19.
- 144 *in quires* unbound.
- 147 *safe's the word* compare *Journal of a Modern Lady* 219.
- 151 *turns* stylistic embellishments.
- 158–60 alluding to the use of initials to disguise the identity of individuals satirized, as a precaution against reprisals.
- 161–8 typical Augustan verse technique, where the ostensible 'alternatives' are covertly identified with one another. The strong suggestion in l. 162 is that the statesman – Walpole – used the services of South Sea stock-jobbers and market operators, if indeed he was not to be regarded as a political 'jobber' himself.
- 165–6] *Orrery*; *HEH*; not in *WF*.
- 168 *suburb wench* see *To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed His Poems* 72 and compare *On Mr Pulteney being Put Out of the Council* 6.
- 172 *kennels* gutters (generally down the middle of a street).
- 175 *marish* marsh; not quite obsolete usage in Swift's day.
- 177 *So have I seen...* standard formula to introduce elaborate simile. Compare *Upon the South Sea Project* 61.
- 181 *downs* mountains or uplands generally, without the overtones which are dominant today of a chalk-based pastoral landscape.
- 189–92] *Scott*; not in *WF*. Lines 189–90 also in *HEH*.
- 190 *well*] *HEH*; ill *Scott*.
- Duck* Stephen Duck: see *On Stephen Duck, the Thresher* and *Biog. Dict.*
- 192 *D'Anvers* Caleb D'Anvers, pseudonym for the writer of *The Craftsman*: see *To a Lady* 183.
- 193 *Sir Bob* Walpole.
- 196 *on the nail* see *The Run upon the Bankers* 17.
- 197–204] *Orrery*, *Scott*, *HEH*; not in *WF*.
- 204 compare *On the Words 'Brother Protestants'*.
- 208 *baubles of the Tower* crown jewels.
- 217–18] *Scott*, *HEH*; not in *WF*.
- 219–20 recalling the action of *The Dunciad*, book I (esp. I, 203–26 in the 1729 edn).
- 227 *Charon's boat* see *A Quibbling Elegy on Boat* 24.
- 229 *Cerberus* see *A Quibbling Elegy on Boat* 27. Again and again the idiom recalls Swift's poems of the South Sea Bubble era, suggesting that he may have planned a poem along the lines of the *Rhapsody* in the early 1720s; or else that, for some reason, his mind was drawn to this phase whilst composing the poem. For 'a sop to Cerberus', see *Tilley* S634.
- 231 '*Sunt geminae Somni portae – Altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto*. Virgil *[iber]* 6' (note in *WF*). The reference is to *Aeneid* VI, 893–5: the full passage is translated by Dryden, 'Two gates the silent house of sleep adorn; / Of polished ivory this, that of transparent horn.' The dominance of this book of the *Aeneid* in Swift's imagination again manifests itself.
- 232 *Excise* see *The Beast's Confession* 150.
- 245 *oracles of both* time-serving lawyers and churchmen.
- 252 *puny judge* punning on 'puisne' judge and 'puny', inconsiderable, ineffectual.



260 *unities* rules derived from Aristotle, which were supposed to confine the action of a play to twenty-four hours and the setting to a single locality: actually it was Castelvetro, as late as 1570, who elaborated these rules (*Poetics* 7-8 gives no explicit warrant). Influential in France, especially in the seventeenth century, they faced opposition in England from the time of Dryden to that of Johnson.

264 *at all hazards* at whatever risk: compare *Tale*, p. 89.

265-6 much scorned critics. For Rymer and Dennis, see Biog. Dict. They are also coupled in the *Tale*, pp. 37, 94, as 'most profound critics'. René le Bossu (1631-80), French neoclassical critic, well known in England for his work on epic poetry. Invoked by Martinus Scriblerus in his prolegomena to *The Dunciad* (PTE V, 50-51), as are Rymer and Dennis.

267 *the prefaces of Dryden* Swift had mixed feelings about his distant relative Dryden; the prefaces are similarly satirized in the *Tale*, p. 131.

272 *Peri Hypsous* the modern transliteration is *hypsos*, but this spoils the rhyme. A critical treatise of the first (?) century A.D. which came to be attributed to a third-century writer, Cassius Longinus. Hugely influential in importing the notion of sublimity into European criticism: Dennis was one of the earliest English critics so affected. See S.H. Monk, *The Sublime* (1935). The work had been translated from Boileau's French in 1698, and again, as part of Boileau's collected works, translated by John Ozell *et al.* (1711-12). There was an edition of the Greek text in 1710. See also note to l. 277.

276 *for love or money* a trite form of words; see Swift to Stella, 7 August 1712 (JTS II, 553), and Tilley L484.

277 *Translated from Boileau's translation* 'by Mr Welsted' (note in WF). Boileau's version dates from 1674. Leonard Welsted brought out a translation in 1712, allegedly based on the Greek original, and with remarks on the English poets appended. Swift was not alone in suspecting that Welsted had really taken his text from Boileau: for a discussion of the point, see D.A. Fineman, *Leonard Welsted: Gentleman Poet of the Augustan Age* (1950), pp. 50-55. See also Biog. Dict.

280 *Battus* usually identified as a nickname of Dryden; in part a generic portrait, with some relation to Pope's Atticus (see *Epistle to Arbuthnot* 209-12).

281 *elbow-chair* armchair with special 'elbows' (supports).

292 *connoisseur* a new word, to some extent replacing the term 'virtuoso'; the earliest usage in OED is in Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714).

296 *Augusta Trinobantum* 'the ancient name of London' (note in WF). The Roman name derived from the tribe of the Trinobantes, who inhabited the region of Middlesex and Essex. 'Augusta' by itself was commonly used for London, as in Dryden, *Mac Flecknoe* 64-5; Pope, *Windsor-Forest* 336, 377; Gay, *Trivia* III, 145; Thomson, *Spring* (1746), 108.

297 *pecks of coals* see *To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed His Poems* 34.

298 for a similar count, see *Tale*, p. 41: see also *Grub Street*, pp. 223, 262, 265-6, for other developments of the motif.

300 *sovereign* the first vowel would be pronounced [â] and make a good rhyme.

316 *Smithfield drolls* the shows put on at Bartholomew Fair: compare *The Dunciad* (1729) I, 2 and note. Swift's interest in puppet-shows and drolls is discussed in P. Rogers, 'Swift, Walpole and the Rope-Dancers', *Papers on Language & Literature* VIII (1972), 159-71.

317-18 Bavius and Maeavius were the types of a poetaster, derived from

Virgil, *Eclogues* III, 90, and often used by the English Augustans, e.g. Pope, *The Dunciad* (1729) III, 16 and note. Compare also Swift to Pope, 26 November 1725: 'Take care the bad poets do not outwit you, as they have served the good ones in every age, whom they have provoked to transmit their names to posterity. Maevius is as well known as Virgil' (*Corr* III, 118).

Kentish Town would then have been a remote country suburb.

319 *Tigellius* Hermogenes Tigellius, a singer and poet despised by Horace: *Satires* I, iii, 3-4. He was much in favour with Caesar and Cleopatra, and is used as the example of a bad writer given official recognition. Enlisted as one of the line of critics in the *Tale*, p. 94.

320 that is, the length of Fleet Street, where the book trade was centred.

323 *Gay* alluding to the ministry's decision to ban the performance of *Polly* in 1728, and the subsequent dismissal of the Duchess of Queensberry from court because of her activities on behalf of Gay. See *Corr* III, 305, 321-6: 'The in-offensive John Gay is now become one of the obstructions to the peace of Europe, the terror of ministers, the chief author of the *Craftsman* and all the seditious pamphlets which have been published against the government. He has got several turned out of their places, the greatest ornament of the court banished from it for his sake, another great lady [Mrs Howard] in danger of being chasé [*sic*] likewise' (Arbuthnot to Swift, 19 March 1729). See also head-note concerning the date of composition.

325-6 *Young* Edward Young had been awarded a pension of £100 after dedicating his poem *The Instalment* to Walpole; it celebrated the prime minister's induction into the Order of the Garter. A few months earlier Young had also dedicated the seventh part of *The Universal Passion* to Walpole. Ministerial writers liked to remind the opposition of these facts. No direct contact between Swift and Young is known of, although Young was a regular correspondent of Tickell, and in touch with Pope, Mrs Howard, and other English acquaintances of Swift. He had sought the favour of Lady Giffard, sister of Swift's patron Temple. In this couplet Swift is no doubt thinking of the incense Young offered to Walpole, Compton, Bubb Dodington, and others in *The Universal Passion* – even if this was rather to win his pension than to keep it.

333 *pericranies* brains; from a rare anglicized version of 'pericranium'.

334 *miscellanies* main stress on first syllable.

335 *Hobbes* one of Swift's copies of *Leviathan* (1651) contained manuscript notes, but it is now lost. (He also owned *De Cive* and other works.) Hobbes's picture of the 'state of war by nature' is contained in Part I, chapter 13 of *Leviathan*, where, however, his emphasis is on discord among humans rather than in the animal kingdom. There is no close parallel in the text to Swift's lines.

353-6 the famous lines are foreshadowed in *Upon the South Sea Project* 73-4: compare also *On a Printer's being Sent to Newgate* 3-4. The later 'folk' versions probably derive, whether consciously or not, from Swift. One variant is quoted by the mathematician Augustus De Morgan in his *Budget of Paradoxes* (1872):

Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em,  
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so *ad infinitum*.  
And the great fleas themselves in turn have greater fleas to go on,  
While these again have greater still, and greater still, and so on.

The imagery of the passage clearly belongs to a phase of what has been called 'the microscopical fad', following the invention of a comparatively efficient mic-



roscope in the second half of the seventeenth century. Swift is known to have read the *Transactions* of the Royal Society, in which, for example, Antony von Leeuwenhoek in 1677 described minute animalcules in semen. This fad, which was a major component in the idiom of Augustan satire, is discussed by Marjorie H. Nicolson, George S. Rousseau, *This Long Disease, My Life* (1968), pp. 243-51 ('The Small in Nature'), whilst Miss Nicolson's *The Microscope and English Imagination* (1956), pp. 170-82, collects literary examples. Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism* (1965), pp. 233-62, considers the way in which imagery of vermin is exploited in the period: pp. 242-5 relate specifically to Swift's poems, including the passage here.

369 *personate* feign, counterfeit.

385 *Flecknoe* Richard Flecknoe (d. ?1678), priest and minor poet, the butt of Marvell and Dryden.

*Howard* probably Edward Howard (fl. 1670), linked in an epigram to James Moore Smythe (l. 415), which has been attributed to Pope (*PTE* VI, 451). See also *The Dunciad* (1729) I, 250; and *Peri Bathous*, p. 27. *NCBEL* gives Howard's dates as '1624-c. 1700', whilst E.L. Steeves (*Peri Bathous*, p. 119) places his death in 1732. There may be some confusion of persons here: ll. 387-8 would not fit if Howard survived as long as that.

388 *Blackmore* Sir Richard Blackmore; see *Biog. Dict.*

392 *Great poet* 'Lord Grimston, lately deceased' (note in *WF*). William, Viscount Grimston, whose loyalty as an M.P. had been rewarded by the grant of a peerage in 1719; see *Biog. Dict.* He produced a play entitled *The Lawyer's Fortune, or Love in a Hollow Tree* (1705), which occasioned much ridicule. There is a reference in *Polite Conversation* (*PW* IV, 144); Pope calls Grimston 'a booby lord' (*Imitations of Horace, Sat. II, ii, 176*); and a derisive edition of *Love in a Hollow Tree* was issued in 1736. I do not know why Swift or Faulkner came to suppose that Grimston had died. His brother Sir Harbottle Luckyn died in 1737, but this would be too late to affect *WF*.

396 *Duncenia* a nonce-word for the kingdom of dunces.  
*common-weal* republic.

397 *pretend* claim.

398 *descend* the italics indicate a pun: (1) to go on in succession, along the line of great dunces; (2) to achieve bathos or the 'profound'. The Scriblerian joke about the art of sinking rests on such misapplications of words: for 'descent' see *Peri Bathous*, pp. 15-16.

405 'The Latins, as they came between the Greeks and us, make use of the word *altitudo*, which implies equally height and depth' (*Peri Bathous*, p. 6).

409 'Vide the treatise on *The Profound*, and Mr Pope's *Dunciad*' (note in *WF*). The entire verse paragraph looks back to these works, especially *Peri Bathous*. For images of diving, see P. Rogers, 'Swift and the Idea of Authority', *The World of Jonathan Swift*, ed. B. Vickers (1968), pp. 29-30.

410 *Welsted* Leonard Welsted: see *Biog. Dict.* and note to l. 277. He figures in *Peri Bathous*, p. 27, as one of the didappers, who 'keep themselves long out of sight, underwater, and come up now and then when you least expect them'. In *The Dunciad* he takes part in the mud-diving games, 'precipitately dull / ... No crab more active in the dirty dance, / Downwards to climb, and backward to advance' (1729 edn, II, 293-300).

412 *The laureate* 'In the London edition, instead of *laureate*, was maliciously inserted Mr Fielding, for whose ingenious writings the supposed author hath



manifested a great esteem' (note in *WF*). Henry Fielding was certainly a great admirer of Swift; there is no evidence outside this note that the feelings were reciprocated, although Swift would doubtless have approved of the tendency of Fielding's plays in the mid 1730s, as they were strongly anti-Walpole.

413 *Concanen* Matthew Concanen: see *Biog. Dict.* In *The Dunciad* (1729) he is styled 'a cold, long-winded native of the deep'; Swift's verses recall *The Dunciad* (1729) II, 287-91. Perhaps offended by his omission from *Peri Bathous*, Concanen had brought out *A Supplement to the Profound* (1728).

415 *Jemmy Moor* James Moore Smythe: see *Biog. Dict.* He also figures both in *Peri Bathous*, p. 28, as one of the frogs, and in *The Dunciad* (1729) II, 31-46, as a phantom poet.

417 *heads to points* facing in opposite directions, or upside down.

427-62] *Orrery*, *Scott*, *HEH*; not in *WF*. Clearly too outspoken to risk publication.

447 *Prometheus* one of Swift's favourite myths. Compare ll. 451-3 with *Prometheus* 3-5.

462 *turn to grazers* not 'graziers' (people who feed cattle), but 'people grazing like animals', as Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was made to do, as a punishment for impiety: Daniel iv, 31-3.

467-8 for the rhyme, see *Twelve Articles* 23-4.

469-70] *Orrery*, *HEH*; not in *WF*.

474 *the conquering hero* the famous lines, 'See the conquering hero comes' were not set by Handel until 1747, but they appeared in Lee's *Rival Queens* (1677), a much performed tragedy, well known to Swift.

475 '*Super et Garamantas et Indos / Proferet imperium - / Jam nunc et Caspia, regna / Responsis horrent divum -*' (note in *WF*). The reference is to *Aeneid* VI, 795-9: Dryden translates, 'Africa and India shall his power obey; / ... At his foreseen approach, already quake / The Caspian kingdoms and Maeotian lake.'

*Hydaspes* a tributary of the Indus; used in classical poetry to express a very remote location (e.g. Virgil, *Georgics* IV, 211).

478 *Short by the knees* 'genibus minor. Horace' (note in *WF*). Alluding to *Epistles* I, xii, 28: 'on bended knees', in effect.

479 *The consort* Queen Caroline: compare *Directions for a Birthday Song* 173-86.

481-2 compare *Directions for a Birthday Song* 69-70.

483 *Iulus* Frederick, Prince of Wales. The name derives from the son of Aeneas, from whom the line of the Emperor Augustus claimed descent.

484 *Late, very late* ... Swift transforms a conventional platitude ('long may he reign') into an insult: 'may it be a long time before he rules us.' In the event, Frederick was never to succeed to the throne.

493 *Bright goddesses* the five daughters of George II and Caroline: see *Directions for a Birthday Song* 165-70.

494 *Duke William* the Duke of Cumberland: see *Directions for a Birthday Song* 200.

496 *without a mate* a sneering allusion to the infidelities of Walpole's wife Catherine, and to his own kept mistress, Maria Skerrett, by whom he had an illegitimate daughter in 1725. See *Plumb*, pp. 78, 112-14.

498 *Atlas* from his bulk; Walpole was often portrayed in caricatures as a Colossus, like Gulliver among the Lilliputians. Compare *Atlas* 15-22.

500 *prudent Fabius* '*Unus homo nobis cunctando restituit rem*' (note in *WF*). A

line from the ancient poet Ennius, preserved in Cicero, *De Officiis* I, xxiv, 84: 'One man restored our state by delays.' Quintus Fabius Maximus, consul of Rome (d. 203 B.C.), who was given the surname Cunctator, 'the delayer', because of his cautious and slow-moving tactics during the Second Punic War. Hence the epithet 'Fabian'. Compare Dryden, *Threnodia Augustalis* 388-9: 'Thou Fabius of a sinking state, /Who didst by wise delays, divert our fate.'

503 *director* a baneful word in the years after the South Sea Bubble: compare *To Charles Ford, Esq. on His Birthday* 40.

508 *the sable flock* churchmen (from their black gowns). The point is that Walpole and Bishop Gibson had ensured a steady flow of Whig appointments to the bishops' bench, some of whom were regarded by High Church clergy as theologically suspect and personally dishonourable.

510 *steerage* helm (as *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* 417).

515 *St George* patron of the Order of the Garter.

516-18 *azure . . . cerulean* the blue ribbon of the Order of the Garter: compare *Verses on the Revival of the Order of the Bath* 2, and *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* 323.

521 see headnote concerning the date of composition.

527 *Lewis* Louis XIV.

529 *mortified his pride* the allies defeated France in the War of Spanish Succession.

540 '*Divisum imperium cum Jove Caesar habet*' (note in *WF*). 'Caesar has divided sovereignty with Jove': the phrase has the ring of Tacitus but I cannot identify a source.

542 *butter-weight* formerly eighteen or more ounces to the pound, hence the obsolete figurative expression meaning 'for good measure'.

544 *Jove* Orrery fills the blank in the original edition with 'Christ'.

548 *Woolston* Thomas Woolston: see *Biog. Dict.* and *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* 281-98.

*Caetera desiderantur* 'the rest is missing': a formula Swift had used to good effect elsewhere, notably in the *Tale*, pp. 170, 200; and *Battle of the Books* (*Tale*, pp. 244, 258).